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SUBJECT: NAJAF ELECTIONS DIRECTOR REPORTS ON POLLING
PREPARATIONS

Classified By: OPA Director Greta Holtz for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (U) This is a Najaf Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY. PRT Najaf met with the Najaf Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) Director Bushra Kadhum Al-Zamily and Deputy Director Anwar Tha'aban Abid Ali regarding preparations for the upcoming elections. Director Bushra described the GEO's election preparations including voter education, staffing for polling sites, security coordination and media relations. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (C) On December 29, the Director of the Najaf Governorate Electoral Office (GEO), Bushra Kadhum Al-Zamily, met with the PRT to discuss the GEO's preparations for Iraq's national parliamentary elections on March 7. Bushra, a Shia who says she identifies with no political party, is the only female GEO director in Iraq. She has been working as the Najaf GEO Director for five years. Bushra began by thanking the PRT for its support, noting that without its assistance they would not be as prepared for the elections in March. She then began to describe meticulously the GEO's election preparations including voter education, staffing for polling sites, security coordination and media relations.

VOTER EDUCATION =====

[1](#)4. (C) GEO Director Bushra told PRTOff that the election preparations are going as planned. She explained that the GEO first focused on notifying Najaf's 1.1 million residents about how voters can learn about where they are registered to vote (NOTE. The province has 282 voting centers, according to Bushra. END NOTE) Next, Bushra explained that the GEO plans to focus on voter education. The Najaf GEO is planning to use billboards, posters, cloth signs and pamphlets to promote the importance of voting. At this time, the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) has records of more than 700,000 registered voters in Najaf. In addition, Bushra told PRTOff that 23,000 agents of political parties, NGOs and other organizations are registered with IHEC to monitor the elections or to be poll watchers in Najaf Province.

[1](#)5. (C) Bushra noted that more than 40 staffers from Najaf GEO already completed their elections personnel training in Baghdad. The Najaf GEO plans to hire an additional 11,000 temporary employees to work at polling stations on election day, and each will receive training on election procedures. The temporary employees are drawn from teachers, lawyers, and other government workers.

SECURITY COORDINATION =====

[1](#)6. (C) Bushra told PRTOffs that the local GEO is coordinating with all Najaf province security forces to ensure the safety of citizens and protection of the ballots. She noted that

two advisors have been assigned to her office - Major Hakim Sarhan Kadhum (Iraqi Army) and Lt. Col. Fuad Abdul Mohsen Khadem (Iraqi Police). They are responsible for the protection of the province,s 282 voting centers (which include 1,791 voting stations).

GEO MEDIA RELATIONS
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17. (C) Bushra explained that she will have a series of meetings with the media, including print, radio and television to discuss the rules of what is permissible. The media will have full access to two voting centers to conduct interviews and do reports with cameras on election day. (NOTE. The GEO prefers print media first and television second because most Najafis do not watch the local television stations. Satellite television is the most popular to locals but is too expensive for her purposes. END NOTE)

COMMENT
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18. (C) The PRT Team Leader has known Bushra since 2007. Bushra was previously very concerned about her relationship with the PRT, often remarking that she did not/not want the PRT members coming to the GEO office because of its proximity to Moqtada Al-Sadr's office in Kufa and her concerns about being seen with U.S. officials. However, Bushra appears to have become comfortable working with PRT Najaf and decided to meet in the early afternoon at the PRT offices. Bushra told PRTOffs that she is also willing to share the election results with PRT Najaf as soon as they are validated. At the end of the meeting, Bushra noted that the nine Elections

Commissioners in Baghdad have permanent positions and guaranteed salaries, unlike any of the provincial GEO heads or GEO staff members. She argued that this exposes the provincial heads to more pressure and blandishments from political parties during election time. Bushra (please protect) asked the PRT to use its influence with the GOI to draw attention to this point.
HILL